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THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN THE EARLY STORIES OF GENESIS.

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The language of these chapters—The text—The literary form on the supposition of Mosaic authorship—The literary form on the supposition of composite authorship—The immediate purpose of the material—Obscurities and difficulties—Some differences and discrepancies—Alleged scientific inaccuracies—The close connection of parallel stories from outside literatures.

In this article an effort will be made to present briefly those facts and considerations which bear upon the human element in the early Genesis stories. It is understood that in the remaining articles (11 and 12) the "divine element" in these chapters will be presented. The reader will therefore remember that at this time we are dealing with but one side of the question, and that consequently the representations of the other side are not to be expected in this treatment.

The question may fairly be asked whether it is necessary at this time or at any time to lay emphasis upon the human element in these chapters. Is it not true that men are only too willing to magnify the human element in the Scriptures, and would it not be better to pass this by? In answer to this question it is to be noted (1) that every statement of a case requires the presentation of both sides, (2) that the number of persons who have too largely ignored the human element is not small, and (3) that the better we understand the human, the clearer will be our conception of the divine element.

1. *The language of these chapters.*—We say to ourselves, and the statement is a true one, the Bible is the Word of God, and consequently these chapters as a part of the Bible constitute a part of that word. But many, in saying this, lose sight of the fact that although the Word of God, it is in the language of man, and that the language of man, no matter what particular language it may be or by whom spoken, is at best a very imperfect and

frequently misleading medium of communication. Moreover, the transfer of divine thought, however communicated to the speaker, into human language must be attended with serious limitations, the character of which will be more and more appreciated as they are contemplated. Still further, the larger part of our material comes from a period of the language or languages of which we know nothing. We may grant that the conceptions come from antediluvian times; they are, nevertheless, at present in a new dress. The names Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, are at best translations of what was earlier used. We may grant the existence of an Adam, but his name could not have been Adam. It is necessary, therefore, in making up our estimate to take into account the inefficiency of language under the most favorable circumstances, and the greatly multiplied difficulties in this regard attending material which comes from or treats of a really prehistoric period.

Something deserves to be said in this connection in reference to the Hebrew. It will be remembered that, whatever may be the original language of the times which our material describes, these stories, if they passed through Abraham's hands, and if we thus assign them the earliest possible date, must have existed, at some time in their transmission, in the language spoken by Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldees.

But Abraham when he reached Canaan gave up his own language, whatever it was, and adopted that of the Canaanites or Phœnicians. This material, therefore, is now in what may be called the Canaanitish language. And thus another transfer has been made. If we stop to think of the significance of all this, we shall begin to see more of the human element and feel more keenly its influence.

But this is not all. The fact is that the Hebrew language in which our stories are written, when compared with other Semitic languages, for example, the Arabic, is grammatically very indefinite. To cite a few facts: (1) while the Arabic has a case system and a modal system which enable it to express most accurately the nicest shades of thought, the Hebrew has almost entirely lost both case and modal systems. It will be said that the English

language has likewise deteriorated, but in the English language a large number of particles, including prepositions and auxiliaries, have been developed to take the place of the lost case and modal systems, while in Hebrew this has not happened. The fact that the same Hebrew word as written could be translated "he will kill," "he must kill," "let him kill," "would that he might kill," or as a passive with these same variations, or as an intensive active or passive with these same variations, or as a causative passive with these same variations, will give some idea of the unsatisfactory character of the Hebrew language as a medium for expressing exact thought. The fact that the verbal form, which in ordinary prose expresses a future idea, may be, and often is, translated as a present or even as a past, and the fact that the verbal form, which in ordinary prose expresses the past, may be, and often is, translated as a present or future, indicates also the indefiniteness of expression which characterizes Hebrew thought.

All that has been here said applies of course to the entire Old Testament. It must, however, also be considered in any final estimate of these stories.

2. *The text*.—This, likewise, is a general consideration and one which has to do with the question under discussion. We may, at all events, note the following points :

(1) The text as we have it is corrupt in many particulars. There are words which cannot be translated because, in their transmission, they have come to be misspelled. Indeed, there are entire phrases which, as we find them, can scarcely be translated with any degree of satisfaction. This is probably true of Genesis 6 : 3, for which so many possible renderings have been proposed, none of which can be absolutely established. The changes which have crept into the text are better appreciated when one compares two editions of the same passage preserved in different portions of Scripture. As examples of this there may be cited the duplicates, Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel, chapter 22 ; also Psalms 14 and 53. In the former passage one word in every four or five has suffered change. It is true that not all these changes are to be charged to the corruption of the text. Some

of them, doubtless, are intentional on the part of the later editor, but such intentional changes carry with them implications as difficult to explain as the assumption of the corrupt text. The text of the Pentateuch in general is, to be sure, the purest of any part of the Old Testament Scriptures. But even here there is evidence, gathered from the study of the phrases, that the form in which we find the material has suffered change.

(2) The text is rendered more or less uncertain by the deliberate changes which have been introduced. As an example of such change we may cite the dates given in the fifth chapter, the summary of which, according to the Hebrew text, gives a period of 1556 years from the creation to the coming of the deluge, while the Samaritan makes a period of 1307, and the Septuagint one of 2260 years. It matters not which of these three calculations is correct. If we decide in favor of the Hebrew, it remains true that the translators of the Septuagint, living a century or a century and a half before Christ, in a time of great formalism, did not hesitate to introduce changes. The fact that, in the case of five of the patriarchs, the age according to the Septuagint is just 100 years longer than that assigned by the Hebrew text, is sufficient indication of deliberate change.

(3) The text as we have it is in an alphabet, not ancient but very modern. In Ezra's time there was adopted the present square alphabet. In the transmission of the material from the earlier alphabet to this later form, errors were made, as close comparison shows; just as in the translation from one language to another the original must suffer, so in the transcription from one alphabet to another the risk of introducing error is increased. As every one knows, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts now in existence are comparatively modern, coming from the ninth or tenth century A. D. The ancient versions, especially the Septuagint, the Peshitto, and the Vulgate, the last of which is at least five centuries older than our oldest manuscripts, give certain evidence of resting upon manuscripts which differ in many particulars from the manuscripts now in our possession. The point to be remembered is that in these words which have come down to us misspelled and consequently unintelligible, in these phrases which

have undergone so much change as to be at least uncertain, in the changes which have been made in the versions, and perhaps in our text, in the transcription from one alphabet to another in Ezra's times, in the many differences between our text and that which lies back of the various ancient versions, we have indications of the presence of the human element. In other words, the Holy Spirit did not in his wisdom see fit to place such safeguards around the original manuscripts of the Old Testament Scriptures as to preserve them from the same injurious influence which has been exerted in connection with other ancient manuscripts. They were placed in the hands of men and have been subject to the disadvantages which naturally follow. Whatever they may have been in the beginning, the divine influence has not preserved them in their original form. All this is an indication of the human element.

3. *The literary form on the supposition of Mosaic authorship.*—Let us assume that the traditional view as to the Mosaic authorship is correct. On this supposition, however, the following points must be conceded :

(1) The material of the Book of Genesis is a compilation from documents. No one advocates the theory that the material of Genesis was spoken by God in the ear of Moses and taken down by him. It is everywhere agreed that several distinct documents have been put together, and that, as thus put together, they constitute the Book of Genesis. The question then suggests itself, what is the source of these several documents : and whatever theory of the stories we adopt we are compelled to admit a large amount of human element.

(2) There is a lack of what may be called proportion of treatment or perspective. It is difficult to see a divine rather than a human purpose in the fact that the creation of the entire world is described in thirty-one verses, while the story of the deluge receives ninety-seven verses. Was the deluge, in the divine mind, of so much greater importance than the creation of the world ? Or is this after all due to a peculiarity of the writer ? Again, it is difficult to explain why, when so brief an account is given of the origin of the universe (thirty-one verses),

so much space should be occupied in a comparatively meaningless repetition of routine phrases such as we find in Gen. 5, or in Gen. 11:10-26. Is this lack of perspective something in which there is to be noted a divine purpose, or is it a defect which is to be connected with the human authorship?

(3) No one will fail to recognize the redundant and repetitious character of, say, chapters 5, 11:10-26, and the four chapters which recount the story of the deluge. It is safe to say that every idea in chapters five to eleven, inclusive, could be expressed in one-half the number of words. If this is true, and no one can well deny it, do we not recognize in it the human?

(4) There are also to be seen in these chapters, on the supposition of the Mosaic authorship, some peculiar methods of composition. The use of Jehovah and Elohim is conceded to be as yet inexplicable. The representations on the same subject are to some extent at least different. The style in one chapter is different from that in another. Are now these differences to be attributed to the divine influence, or are they characteristic of the original documents of which the material is composed, or are they to be attributed to the peculiar method of thinking of the compiler of the material?

4. *The literary form on the supposition of composite authorship.*—If now we grant that the analysis of the Book of Genesis shows two or three distinct writings which have been brought together at a date comparatively modern, we find, (1) that different writers give us widely varying accounts of the same event. It is not understood that the statements differ more widely when separated than when joined together. The separation, however, removes the necessity for the forced interpretation which has been pressed upon them for so many centuries. These variations, which are by no means small, are surely indicative of the human element.

(2) That the material has been transmitted to some extent in oral form, and there is no reason to suppose that a divine Providence miraculously controlled the oral transmission, in view of the fact that no such miraculous influence is exerted after the material has taken written form.

(3) That the narratives are in some cases centuries later than the events narrated in them.

(4) That the narratives are colored in form and augmented in material by the thought of the times of the writer. This is seen in the familiar usage of the word Jehovah in the earliest chapters of Genesis, although we are told (Ex. 6:3) that the name was first revealed to Moses at the time of the Exodus; also in the full conception of sacrifice which, according to some of the representations made, existed even as early as the days of Cain and Abel.

(5) That the joining of the original narratives by a redactor has not been accomplished without changes, omissions, and insertions. Here, certainly, although we may assume the divine guidance of the redactor, as well as of the original writer, the human element involved is not inconsiderable.

5. *The immediate purpose of the material.*—The reader who examines these chapters with any sort of care will soon perceive that the purpose of the writer or compiler is not an historical purpose. He does not collect this material simply to record certain great events of which in some way he has become informed. The chief thing in his mind is not a statement of facts. One sees, on the other hand, that the purpose is, at least in part, philosophical, inasmuch as an effort is made to explain existing facts and conditions. It is not the creation itself of which he writes, but the order and purpose of creation and the spirit that ruled in all creative work. It is the significance of the divine acts in their relation to man which is made prominent. The writer sees about him on every side differences of language. This is to be explained as a punishment for sin. It is a barrier which will prevent men from combining for wicked purposes. And so with all the other stories. It is also in large part didactic and intended to show the enormity and the fatal consequences of sin, the power and the gracious providence of God. Material therefore is selected which will illustrate these great teachings. Events of the most important character, from the ordinary historical point of view, are entirely omitted because they will not throw additional light on these teachings.

No one will fail to see how great the influence of such a purpose will be on the form and the material. There is a sense, as we shall see later, in which this purpose is inspired of God ; there is also a sense in which it is the human interpretation of divine acts and of events taking place under divine guidance. In this latter sense, the element is a human element.

6. *Obscurities and difficulties.*—From time immemorial men have made an effort to explain the sacred Scriptures. When we consider the number of volumes that have been written to make these scriptures clear, we are at times tempted to think that it must have been a part of the purpose of the divine author to make them obscure ; at any rate, notwithstanding all that has been written, the obscurities and the difficulties—especially those found in the earlier chapters of Genesis—are most numerous. The very fact that they have needed so much explanation is a fact which proves the existence of obscurities and difficulties.

Their character is varied. Sometimes it is a word of which no one knows the meaning ; sometimes it is a verse which seems to have no logical connection with what precedes or follows ; sometimes it is an historical allusion ; at other times it is a reference to some archæological custom ; many entire books are obscure as to the meaning which they were intended to convey. Those who have studied the first chapters of Genesis realize how much there is in these chapters which seems to be inexplicable. Now were these obscurities and difficulties a part of the original plan ? If so, what was the purpose of introducing them ? But if they were not a part of the original plan, are they not clearly defects, and therefore do they not furnish testimony of the human element ? No one today will pretend to ascribe these difficulties to the Holy Spirit. They are due to the fact that the words were originally written centuries ago, under circumstances entirely different from those in the midst of which we live. Many things were known to the people to whom these words were first uttered, in the light of which they had a plain meaning. To us, however, who are unacquainted with the circumstances, there is much that is dark and inexplicable. Here, certainly, is evidence of the human element.

7. *Some differences and discrepancies.*—Our study of these stories has furnished us evidence of the existence of differences and discrepancies; it is possible perhaps on the basis of certain assumptions to explain some of these, but in spite of every explanation many remain. These differences relate to grammatical usages; to the use of words; to rhetorical style; to historical references; to the particulars of the various stories which are related; to the theological conceptions which characterize the writers.

It is clear that on the supposition of two or more writers the significance of such differences is minimized. We expect to find differences in the statements of three witnesses to the same events, and of three writers about the same subject. The difficulty of explaining them is greater if we are compelled to suppose that the material all comes from one hand.

Much here also depends upon our conception of the final editor and his work. If his purpose was a purely historical one, we are at a loss to know why he should place side by side accounts of the same event so different from each other. If, however, his purpose was a religious one, viz., to teach certain great religious truths, and if these stories are cited as illustrations of the truths, then the whole question assumes a new aspect. In any case there are some points which ought to be remembered: (1) That the material of these reports comes from an ante-scientific period, that is, a period which antedates the birth of that scientific accuracy and critical spirit which today rule the world. In this period, we ought not to expect to find that which might be expected today. (2) That the work is actuated by what may be called a non-scientific purpose; this has already been mentioned. (3) The sources are given us and these, as modern investigators appreciate, are very much more valuable than any digested material which our editor might have left us. Instead of regretting that he chose the policy of placing side by side these reports from different sources, although they do not agree with each other, let us rejoice that he was led to give us the original sources which were within his reach, rather than the results of the attempted reconciliation. (4) There are no dif-

ferences and discrepancies for which parallels may not be found in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, which traverse the same historical periods. One need only make a verbal comparison of two passages as given in Kings and Chronicles to find exactly the same kinds of differences and discrepancies as those which we have noted in these chapters. The same explanation will hold good there and here. (5) A still more interesting field for comparison is that furnished by the Gospels of the New Testament. Here the difficulties and differences are even more numerous and more perplexing. It is evident to a candid student that in all this we see the human factor. It cannot be disguised, it ought not to be ignored. If we grant a large human element all is explained. If we deny it, we certainly assume a grave responsibility in attributing to the Holy Spirit that which is dishonorable and degrading.

8. *Alleged scientific inaccuracies.*—From the point of view of one who takes the position that has been taken in these papers, the alleged scientific inaccuracies are not to be called inaccuracies. If a writer attempts to write a scientific treatise and his statements do not harmonize with the teachings of the science which he represents, we may call these statements inaccurate. It is not right, however, to apply the test of scientific accuracy to statements never made for the purpose of teaching science, but which, written for another purpose, made use of the scientific or unscientific ideas of the times. Biblical apologists will find it much safer to refuse altogether to compare the scientific implications of the early chapters of Genesis with the results of modern science. It has been seen that the writers of these chapters (1) believed in a creative day of twenty-four hours, and represented creation as having taken place within six of these days; (2) represent the light as having existed before the creation of the luminaries; (3) represent the creation of the luminaries according as they appeared to the eye; namely, the sun, the moon, and the stars; (4) seem to represent the serpent as of different form and character before the curse pronounced upon him. It has been seen that the representations made concerning the garden of Eden, its situation and its rivers, are ideal repre-

sentations ; that at no period in the history of investigation has it been possible to determine the details ; that the elements in the representation are found in the same forms in other ancient accounts ; that these do not accord strictly with geographical science. It has been seen that the great ages assigned to the patriarchs are not borne out by history, and are contrary to the teachings of physiological science ; that a table of nations is given which purports to be ethnological and to include all the descendents of Noah, in which, however, many omissions are to be found—a table which, indeed, omits certain great races altogether, and which, therefore, cannot be called a scientific table. These are a few of many important variations between what seem to be the implications of the narratives and the results of science. Now, so far as these differences exist, we must acknowledge that they indicate the human side. In explanation of them we may call attention to two things : (1) the circumstances and surroundings of the writers which made it impossible for them to have written otherwise than as they did. Correct scientific statements would have been utterly confounding in those days. There is as much ground for expecting the Holy Spirit to have given to the ancient writers a different language from that which they ordinarily spoke, or a different vocabulary, as to have expected him to have given scientific conceptions different from those of the times. Those days were days in which science was unknown, scientific methods yet unheard of. At all events, it must be conceded that if the Holy Spirit undertook to reveal a scientific knowledge of things to men of those days, the revelation made was of a strange and peculiar character. Really it is nothing short of blasphemy to attribute these things to the Holy Spirit.

(2) The purpose and plan of the writer. Here, after all, is the important consideration. If these writers were attempting to teach science ; if it was their purpose to indicate certain representations as revelations from on high, the case, in view of all the facts, would be most serious. But no one can show that this was their purpose. It is clear that they had in mind, as we have so frequently shown, a purely religious purpose, and that,

in the carrying out of this purpose, they used material of every kind which came within their reach. This relieves them from the charges which may otherwise be made against them, and, above all, it relieves the Author of the religious ideas which filled their hearts, from the charge of having been ignorant of the facts of the universe of which he himself was the creator. The difficulties which exist, if the human element is ignored, are many and insuperable. But these difficulties, upon the recognition of the human element, vanish in a moment.

9. *The close connection of parallel stories from outside literatures.*—Perhaps a larger share of our attention in the preceding papers has been given to this division of the subject than to any other, and rightly so, in view of its tremendous importance. Any attempt to explain the early stories of Genesis without at the same time consideration of the outside material will, of course, prove inadequate. The matter seems to present itself as follows :

(1) Stories covering exactly the same ground included in the early stories of Genesis are found in all of the more important literatures of antiquity. These outside stories treat of the same subjects—the creation, paradise, the beginning of sin, the fratricide, the fall of angels, the deluge, etc.

(2) Some sort of connection of the outside stories with the Hebrew stories is universally acknowledged. That they stand related no one denies.

(3) A careful investigation of the question shows that the outside stories cannot be traced to the Hebrew story in each case as the original. There is overwhelming evidence that, at all events in some instances, the outside story is older than the corresponding Hebrew story.

(4) It seems certain, notwithstanding the representations of an influential school of modern criticism, that the Hebrew stories are not derived from any of the outside stories, at least in the form in which these outside stories have come to us.

(5) It seems to be a just conclusion that the Hebrew and the outside stories are sisters from one source. The question at once arises, What is that source?

(6) That source is not on the one hand a naturalistic myth,

as some would persuade us to believe; nor on the other hand, as it has commonly been taught, is it an objective revelation from heaven. The facts favor neither of these hypotheses.

(7) That source in each case is an *objective historical fact*, which impressed itself upon the minds of many nations, and which in its religious implications was correctly represented *only* by the Hebrews. And in all this the human factor is of course tremendous. Just where the line will be drawn, how much is human and how much divine, we must confess our inability always, or perhaps in any case, to determine. Whatever else is true we are confident that *the hand of man* is seen on every page, yes, in every line.

Our conclusion, and it is a conclusion which follows naturally, is threefold:

1) The human element in these early stories is clearly to be found.

2) This human element presents itself in great variety of forms; and

3) This human element is of most pervasive character.

The discussion, this time, has been altogether one-sided. No consideration whatever has been given to the existence of the divine element. This one-sidedness, as every reader will concede, was a necessity of the case. In the two papers which follow an effort will be made to present more fully the divine element. Will the reader kindly hold in abeyance any judgment which he is impelled to form, on one side or another, until both sides of the question have been presented?